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Legislative Alert: 2013 National Defense Authorization Bill

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Legislative Alert: 2013 National Defense Authorization Bill

Abstract

[Excerpt] On behalf of the AFL-CIO, I write in opposition to provisions changing nuclear weapons worker health and safety programs that are included in the House Armed Services Committee's 2013 National Defense Authorization bill. These changes would seriously weaken worker safety & health protections at Department of Energy (DOE) nuclear weapons complexes.

Keywords

AFL-CIO, Legislative Alert, 2013 National Defense Authorization Bill

Comments

Suggested Citation

Samuel, W. (2012, May 8). *Legislative Alert: 2013 National Defense Authorization Bill*. Washington, DC: AFL-CIO.

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AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR AND CONGRESS OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATIONS



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EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT

LEGISLATIVE ALERT!

(202) 637-5057

May, 8 2012

Honorable Carl Levin, Chairman
Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Levin:

On behalf of the AFL-CIO, I write in opposition to provisions changing nuclear weapons worker health and safety programs that are included in the House Armed Services Committee's 2013 National Defense Authorization bill. These changes would seriously weaken worker safety & health protections at Department of Energy (DOE) nuclear weapons complexes.

Nuclear weapons facilities are particularly hazardous for workers. We have worked with DOE over the years to build an essential, integrated and effective worker health and safety program. It would be a mistake to transfer worker safety and health responsibilities from the DOE's Office of Health, Safety and Security (HSS) to the quasi-independent National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) which has no experience in occupational safety & health.

Shifting the entire safety & health program to NNSA would eliminate current DOE worker health and safety standards and enforcement and replace them with weaker standards and "performance-based" oversight. Contrary to claims that the bill would simply subject NNSA facilities to the same requirements as those under the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the bill would strip workers of all rights to be protected from retaliation for raising safety and health concerns, and the rights to be involved in workplace inspections. It would also eliminate any requirements for employers to record and report injuries and illnesses.

Nuclear weapons facilities are unlike and more hazardous than other workplaces and DOE has particular standards to address these hazards. For example, DOE order 850 has a standard regarding beryllium that is 10 times higher than the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) standard. DOE order 851 ensures that these sites have specific and proactive health and safety programs. The legislation would erase these important worker safety protections.

DOE weapons facilities have a long history of radioactive and toxic waste contamination and worker exposures that have resulted in thousands of cases of cancer and beryllium disease. These past failures have cost the government and taxpayers billions of dollars for environmental remediation and compensation.

The adoption of the House Armed Services provision would turn back the clock and allow a return to conditions and practices that caused these disasters. I strongly urge that these provisions be rejected and that worker safety and health programs be maintained at the DOE-HSS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'William Samuel', with a stylized, flowing script.

William Samuel, Director
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

cc: House Committee on Armed Services